

Remarks to the United Steel Workers Convention *August 8, 1996*

Thank you. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the introduction. Thank you for the warm welcome. I want to thank Senator Chris Dodd for his leadership for our party and for what he said. I want to thank you, George, for your invaluable contribution to the Democratic platform drafting committee. I know the committee has worked very hard. I know you played a big part in their work. And I am very, very proud of the products we've produced without the kind of bloodletting, division, and difficulties that we see our Republican counterparts going through.

I also want to congratulate Jack Sheehan upon his retirement. Jack, you joined the United Steel Workers in 1951, and in the years that followed you've been a tireless force for the labor movement. Thank you. Your commitment is an inspiration to all of us. And I wish you well as you move on to new challenges.

I wish I could be there to thank each and every one of you for your endorsement. Your support is crucial. You've been there with me and with Al Gore all the way, and you've made a real difference. I'm glad this satellite broadcast lets me see and hear all of you out there in Pittsburgh, a city that has come to symbolize the heart and soul of the steel industry and the workers who built America from the ground up, the city that never gives up and represents the best in our country.

On Monday you came together to celebrate plans to unify the United Steel Workers, the United Auto Workers, and the International Association of Machinists. I salute you as you go forward together as strong as the steel you transform. Soon you will be the largest union in North America. With leaders like George Becker, Steve Yokich, and George Kourpias, I've got no doubt that you'll become the largest in the world. *[Applause]* Thank you. I heard a rumor that at the rate you're going, you may have to change your name to "Heavy Metal" soon. Then you can get a lot more young people in.

I'm glad to have the chance to talk to you about issues that you and I care about so much and about the choice our country is facing in November. You know what it is. You know what the choice is. But as Senator Dodd said, in

the next 88 days we need your help to make sure that every American knows what the choice is.

Almost 4 years ago, we began a journey together, a journey to restore America's working families, to give them a sense of economic security and well-being that was then being lost. We worked hard to make Government reflect the values working people have long struggled for, values your movement continues to represent: opportunity, responsibility, community, fair treatment on the job, the chance to make a decent living and to support your families.

We've made real progress in the past 4 years. There are 900,000 new construction jobs, 4.4 million Americans have become new homeowners, 10 million more have refinanced their home mortgages at lower rates. Exports are at record levels. We have record numbers of new small businesses. The combined rate of unemployment, inflation, and mortgages is now the lowest in three decades. We've cut the deficit by 60 percent; now it's the smallest it's been since 1981. And our economy has created over 10 million new jobs. And real wages, which had been falling for a decade, have finally begun to rise again. Our economy is the soundest it has been in a generation.

Now, we all know that's a record to build on, not to sit on. We have to make sure America works for working families. That's why I vetoed the Republican budget that undermined Medicare, Medicaid, education and the environment, and the sanctities of working people's pensions. That's why I fought for the Family and Medical Leave Act, against the Republican congressional opposition. That's why I worked to expand the earned-income tax credit, to give a tax cut to more than 15 million of our hardest pressed working families. That's why I fought so hard, with your help, to make Congress do the right thing and increase the minimum wage. And in a matter of days, it will be the law of the land, thanks to you and so many like you throughout this country. That's why you and I together fought and won the battle to make sure that you don't lose your health insurance if you lose your job or if someone in your family gets sick, why we fought and won the battle to make

sure you can keep saving for your retirement when you change jobs, why I'll continue to oppose efforts to let corporations raid workers' pension funds. We must not do that under the guise of balancing the budget.

Soon after I took office, I got rid of my predecessor's anti-worker, anti-union Executive orders. Our administration is pro-family, pro-worker, and pro-union. I strongly support collective bargaining for all employees. It's not a privilege, it's the right of all workers.

This Congress tried to make replacement workers the law of the land; I wouldn't let them. I supported legislation banning permanent replacement workers. I signed an Executive order to prevent companies who do business with the Federal Government from hiring permanent replacement workers. When a court blocked my order, I directed the Justice Department to take all appropriate steps to overturn the decision.

This Congress tried to make unsafe workplaces the law of the land, and I wouldn't let them do that either. I vetoed their budget that would have strangled OSHA's ability to enforce the safety laws that protect our workers. We can have a strong economy without sacrificing worker safety, and I'll keep fighting for both.

This Congress tried to make company unions the law of the land, and I wouldn't let them do that either. I vetoed the TEAM Act. When they tried to gut the National Labor Relations Board by slashing its budget, I said no. When they tried to undermine the prevailing wage laws, I said no. And I will continue to use that veto pen to stop Republicans in Congress from attacking our working families and the unions that represent them until we can turn this around and get everybody on the side of building a better America together.

You and your families and the millions of working families just like you are the heart and soul of the American dream. We have to keep working together not just to preserve what's been won but to continue to fight for better jobs, higher wages, more growth, and more justice. America's unequalled progress throughout the 20th century would not have been possible without the unions that helped to make it happen. Your history is America's history; your struggle is America's struggle. Now, as we prepare to enter the 21st century, we have to continue to work together to prepare our workers for the challenges of the future, together.

This is a moment of remarkable promise for our Nation. I believe that our children will have more opportunities to live out their dreams than any generation before them if we continue to hold to our most basic values: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a stronger American community reaching out across all our diversities. Then we can make sure that the next century will truly be an American century. You're more than doing your part. And I'm determined to be your partner.

Remember now, 88 days. Go out and tell your fellow Americans, number one, compared to 4 years ago, the economy is in better shape. The crime rate is down. We've taken strong action to move people from welfare to work, to help the poorest working families, to lift up our children. Number two, we have a big contest here about the future. You remember what they tried to do, how they shut the Government down twice, what they tried to do to Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. Unless we win the Presidential race and change the composition of the Congress, they'll keep trying it over and over and over again. I'm determined to stop them, and you are, too, and it's not necessary to balance the budget.

And finally, as we look toward the future, we have to do more to create more good jobs, to give our people the educational opportunities they need, to make sure we go forward together into the next century. This is not the time to change the course we're on, it's the time to build on the course we're on and bring in more folks to fight the good fight.

That's what you're trying to do. I'm grateful to you. We're going to be partners, and we're going to be successful with your efforts.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke by satellite at 9:40 a.m. from the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose, CA, to the convention meeting in Pittsburgh, PA. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Christopher J. Dodd, general chairman, Democratic National Committee; George F. Becker, international president, and Jack Sheehan, former legislative director, United Steel Workers; Stephen P. Yokich, president, United Auto Workers; and George J. Kourpias, president, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.